

Jail Transition Initiative: A Cooperative Program Between Corrections and Human Services

IN EARLY 1998 I WAS invited to become a member of the Dane County Health and Human Needs and Human Services Board Subcommittee on Alcohol, Tobacco and Drug Abuse. It was the first time the Sheriff's Office was invited to sit on a committee to assist in deciding potential budget issues for the Department of Human Services. Needless to say, I was somewhat apprehensive as a jail administrator in this environment, as we are traditionally at odds with many in the human service field. Many members of the subcommittee were treatment providers and looked upon the jail as, at best, an evil necessity. However, I took it as my mission to become educated and to educate.

Trading knowledge about what each agency does and what the jail was already doing in programming resulted in great advances toward program ideas. The outcome of my participation in this subcommittee was a mutually beneficial idea to use existing W-2 funding to assist in making inmates retain responsibility for their minor children.

W-2 IS AN EMPLOYMENT- based program that replaced the traditional cash assistance program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), for families in need. Families with children now are eligible to partici-

pate in one of four "tiers" of work-related activity rather than to receive direct cash assistance. The four tiers are unsubsidized employment, trial jobs, community service jobs, and W-2 transition.

W-2 and very low-income working families are also eligible for support services including food stamps, medical assistance, and childcare. Other support may include job access loans, assistance in meeting work-related expenses, and employment and training services. Employment services include employment assessment, orientation and motivation workshops, resume and interviewing skills development, job search assistance, and job development and placement assistance.

TIER 1: Unsubsidized employment may include job search assistance, transportation, childcare, and similar support. Most potential recipients find employment in this phase and become eligible for support services rather than W-2. Persons who have recently become employed continue to maintain a relationship with a Financial

Employment Planner for at least 90 days after placement or until they have successfully completed a formal probationary period.

TIER 2: A trial job contract helps the employer cover the cost of training or limited extra support for a participant's first 3 to 6 months of employment. Trial jobs are expected to result in a permanent hire.

TIER 3: Community service jobs are for those who lack experience or need to practice the habits and soft skills required by an employer. Community service jobs involve 30 hours in the workplace each week and additional hours in workshops or in seeking jobs.

TIER 4: W-2 transition is for those who are unable to perform independent, self-sustaining work without additional treatment or support. Persons in this group may be dealing with severe disabilities, mental

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health problems, chemical dependency, or other severe limitations. They may receive professional vocational assessment and an individualized treatment plan designed either to remedy the problems or to support movement to Supplemental Security Income.

AT THE INCEPTION OF
this program I posed a simple question to members of the subcommittee. It was my hypothesis that many of the inmates in the jail system were at one time or another clients of human service providers. We decided that it would be interesting to take a snapshot of the female jail inmate population and cross-reference the jail's computerized data with data maintained by the Dane County Department of Human Services.

The data show many intersections between the female jail inmate population and the services provided through the Department of Human Services. The results of the snapshot and database comparisons as of July 1, 1998, were as follows:

113 women were in jail on that date. Of those:

- Forty-nine (49, or 43.4 percent) were white.
- Forty-one (41, or 36.2 percent) were African American.
- Twenty-three (23, or 20.4 percent) were of unknown race/ethnicity.
- Forty-three (43, or 38.1 percent) were arrested for involvement with alcohol or drugs.

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Detailed information was gathered on 90 women:

- Sixty-two (62, or 68.9 percent) received Economic Assistance and Work Services (EAWS) benefits.
- Twelve (12, or 13.3 percent) were currently in contact with a Department of Human Services social worker in the Children Youth and Family (CYF) Division.
- Eight (8, or 9 percent) had both EAWS services and a CYF social worker.
- Fifty-one (51, or 57 percent) of the women were mothers, and the group had a total of 91 children under age 18. Of these children, six were in a Kinship Care Program, and 13 were in foster care.

As of July 1, 1998:

- Thirty-five (35) of the women received AFDC but were not enrolled in W-2.
- Eight women had had W-2 services denied. (No information was available on the reasons for denial.)
- Among the 43 women with arrests involving alcohol or drug abuse, 21 were receiving EAWS services, 12 were receiving AFDC, and four were receiving W-2 services.

SUPPORT UNDER THE W-2
program is just beginning in the Dane County jail system. Social workers have been hired through a contract with the Department of Human Services. They have access to the jail system and space

for conducting interviews and counseling and screening potential clients for the program. We have already found a list of clients who can benefit from this program. As of this writing, the first group of women has been oriented, and several have had intensive interviews. In addition, one W-2 participant has been released from the jail and has followed up with the program in the community.

The positive incentives for participants to change their behavior are tremendous. Usually, we in corrections deal in negative reinforcements, including discipline, in attempting to alter inmates' behavior. This program, however, offers the inmate a whole package of potential life-changing support and skills to achieve true jail diversion-which means never coming back to jail.

The true test, of course, will be to show how much impact these services have in changing the behaviors of the clients served. This should make good reading for the next article on this topic.

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